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ABSTRACT

Numerous reasons can be cited by scholars concerning lexical problems that face anyone embarking upon such an enterprise as that of preparing a Basque-English dictionary. First, "euskera," a term given to this ancient tongue, is both written and spoken today as it was millennia ago. Second, Basque, as a result, has not been subjected to constant revisions, improvements, additions and deletions of vocabulary as has occurred in English. Third, in reference to linguistic classification, the former, like Finnish, is both flexional and agglutinative, while the latter, by distinction, is flexional but isolating, which implies being completely analytic. Fourth, and perhaps the most salient characteristic of Basque, and which indeed presents enormous problems to any linguist, is the complex structure of dialectal variations inherent in the language's syntax and vocabulary. These variations, in terms of spellings and meanings, are not mutually understandable by Basques. Basque lexicographers concur that having a Basque-English dictionary would serve not only as an indispensable tool to scholarly research in determining clues to the mystery surrounding the origin of Basque, but would be an instructive guide in terms of furnishing precise information relative to etymology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Lastly, Basques in America and elsewhere would have a text of English vocabulary, word meanings and their essential components to improve their skills in the two languages. (Author/CFM)

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A BASQUE-ENGLISH DICTIONARY: A TWENTIETH-CENTURY REALITY?

Curiously, with respect to a rather broad scope of lexical historiography, the primal dictionary of the Basque language coupled with Spanish definitions was compiled by a sixteenth century Italian grammarian named Nicolà Landuchio. In receipt of information and data gleaned from existing Basque manuscripts, and assisted in his efforts by collaborators from the northern Spanish city of Vitoria, Landuchio completed his work in 1562, which his titled the Dictionarium Linguae Cantabricae. This early text of Basque vocabulary remained unpublished for nearly four centuries, until the year 1958, when two renowned scholars, Manuel Agud and Luis Michelena, edited and published Landuchio's lexicon. Historically, in view of Basque lexicographical literature, from the sixteenth century to the present, several noteworthy lexicographers in Spain and France, largely members of ecclesiastical orders, dedicated their learned talents toward the compilation of bilingual and multilingual Basque dictionaries. In the majority of examples, Basque has been accompanied with Spanish, French, or Latin. One interesting dictionary, namely the Diccionario trilingüe Tagalo-Castellano-Cántabro by Melchor de Oyangurer (1688-1747), combines Tagalog with Spanish and Basque. To date, approximately twenty Basque dictionaries abound and among those worthwhile mentioning at this point because of certain intrinsic linguistic value include ones by Añibarro, Aizquíbel, Louis Bonaparte, Lhande, van Eys, and a few other lexicographers. Additional reference also might be made herewith to lesser-known Basque dictionaries, to wit, those of Silvain Pouvreau, Domingo Bidegaray, Azpitarte, Hiribarren, Duvoisin, Ochandiano, Novia de Salcedo, and others. To repeat, each of these lexicographers combined Basque either with French, Spanish, or Latin, except for Oyanguren, and in some cases, all three languages into one lexicon.

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Apart from the aforesaid lexicographers, it is significant to point out two dictionaries that innumerable scholars, in large measure, have regarded as meriting the most scholarly recognition in their day, and which therefore have served as cornerstones in the field of Basque lexicography. The first work is the monumental and comprehensive two volume Diccionario Trilingüe del Castellano, Bascuence y Latín, compiled by Manuel de Larramendi, a Jesuit priest from Andoain (Guipúzcoa), who completed his lexicon in 1745. It is remarkable that the prologue to his massive dictionary is a detailed study itself of the Basque language, whose length of two hundred and twenty pages contains data on Basque lexicography and syntax. In order of vocabulary arrangement, Larramendi set out to formulate his opus according to word-lists found in the then "Diccionario de la Academia Real Española," placing Basque and Latin definitions for each Spanish entry. For years his lexicon has stood its ground as a reference text of extraordinary magnitude and content, even though criticism has been leveled against it by certain lexicographers whose objections consist of the textual omission of dialectal terminology, the inclusion of several inaccurate terms which Larramendi seemingly invented, and other minor shortcomings.[1] Yet, despite the fact that personal critiques of the dictionary have often been of a negative interpretation, it has indubitable lexical value today as noted by a wealth of authentic definitions and supplementary linguistic information which Larramendi inserted into the lexicon, as well as the fact that it has served as an indispensable reference guide to numerous Basque grammarians and other scholars for generations. The second, and more recent Basque dictionary, is the work of Resurrección María de Azcue, also a Jesuit priest from Lequeitio (Vizcaya), who completed his colossal two volume Diccionario Vasco-Español-Francés in 1906, and published it in Tours. One notes that Azcue chose to rearrange the order of language entries from that of his predecessor, certainly a more valid approach, and he likewise broadened

the range of sectional vocabulary by incorporating dialectal nomenclature and areas of extension for all authentic Basque terminology. Parenthetically, upon examining the wealth of lexical information contained in Azcue's enormous lexicon, it becomes even more incredible to learn that he published his much-heralded dictionary at the youthful age of thirty-nine.

During recent decades, two highly useful lexicons have appeared, each of which has specific points of lexicographical value and interest. The first is Múgica's Diccionario Castellano-Vasco, published in Bilbao in 1965, which took this Jesuit scholar twenty-five years to complete. The second lexicon which has been well-received in academic circles, but contextually a much shorter work than their contemporary Múgica, is Tournier and Lafitte's Lexique Français-Basque, published eleven years earlier in 1954 in Bayonne. It is worthwhile stating here that Lafitte had previously collaborated with another eminent lexicographer, namely Aranart, to re-edit, complete, and finally publish Pierre Lhande's unfinished, but notable 1926 Dictionnaire Basque-Français. The Lhande text is particularly curious in its grouping of its derivations of words followed by the original terms themselves. Moreover, this lexicon, although limited solely to French and Basque dialects, was chiefly inspired by the aforesaid dictionary of Azcue, as well as the unpublished vocabularies of three important, but lesser-known French lexicographers, Harriet, Hiribarren, and Foix.[2]

Amid all the above historical background, it becomes clear to the reader that notwithstanding the current existence and accessibility of several bilingual and multilingual Basque dictionaries, none presently has been fully realized incorporating the English language. Even though this writer and doubtless other adventurous lexicographers have at one time or another essayed to bring such a difficult enterprise to fruition, success in this regard has yet

to be achieved. Curiously, with reference to current bilingual English dictionaries, a careful examination of card catalogues in our major libraries reveals the existence of forty-six lexicons that combine that language with Spanish, French, German, Russian, Chinese, Latin, and so forth. In addition, there also prevails a list of dictionaries that comprise English with relatively minor tongues such as Samoan, Thai, Aleut, Assyrian, Somali, Tzotzil, and others. Nonetheless, to date, no Basque-English dictionary has fully materialized in print, regardless of the fact that more than four to five million Basques are presently living throughout various parts of the world. Unfortunately, no statistical information can pinpoint or even determine closely the distribution of dialectal speakers of Basque not only in Spain and France, but in Latin America, Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the United States. However, it is generally conceived that more Basques communicate orally in their own dialect than they use it for written objectives.

At this moment, certain arguments might be raised as to the necessity or viability of preparing a formal bilingual dictionary of these two languages. First, in an effort to support the justification of compiling such a lexicon, recent estimations cited by staff officials at the Basque Studies Program at the University of Nevada-Reno indicate that there are approximately 50,000 to 100,000 American of Basque descent residing in the western United States, who continually unite together in social clubs, at schools, churches, and elsewhere to sponsor various cultural festivals for the express purpose of preserving their heritage which dates back millennia ago. More today than at other times in the past, young Basques here and abroad are, in large measure, avidly interested in learning the fundamentals of "euskera," a name given to their inscrutable tongue, or improving their skills in its usage, which essentially speaking is undeniably considered by them as being too complex to master. In reference to demographic charts, distributive figures show

the present-day location of Basques inhabiting not only northern Spain and southwestern France, but also in the above-named countries of South America, the Philippines, Indonesia, and eastern Australia. In western sections of our country, it is known that southern California has many French Basques, whereas northern California, and portions of Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Utah, and Colorado have mostly Spanish Basques. With the advent of "jai-alai" centers in New England within the past year, specifically in the states of Connecticut and Rhode Island, additional Basque families can be counted in the census , together with already existing Basques living in New York, New Jersey, and elsewhere, thus filling the ethnic population growth rate in this nation. Irrespective of which section of the country where Basques reside, each grouping or individual knowledgeable of his or her own dialect will use it independently from Spanish or English, according to and depending on the exact need or persoanl situation.

Numerous reasons can be adduced by scholars regarding lexical problems that face the challenger willing to embark on such a herculean project as the preparation of a Basque-English dictionary. First, "euskera" is, for the greater part of its morphology, both written and spoken today as it was untold years ago, but its vocabulary has been somewhat modified to keep pace with existing trends or conditions of a human nature. In essence, it may seem rather peculiar or perhaps difficult to accept the notion that basically certain orthographical modifications, which Aizquíbel pointed out in his Diccionario Basco-Español (1885), such as replacing letters c and qu with k and z respectively, as well as employing g always as a soft sound, as representing essentially the only major reforms that have distinguished present-day Basque orthrography from that of the past. Second, "euskera," as a result, has not been subjected to constant revisions, emendations, additions, and deletions of vocabulary as has so often occurred in English. Further, it must be stated that

certain perplexing questions surface in regard to the subject of neologisms, particularly in those areas of scientific and technological knowledge, to say little momentarily of countless terms of universal usage that have been coined in English during the last thirty or forty years. Consequently, Basque, for lack of such new vocabulary, must rely on combining explicit root words, adding thereto suffixes, prefixes, and inserting other syllables with certain modifications, so that some credibility and semblance of meaning might be retained as well as given to the primary definitions in Basque of any newly adopted English term. Third, and one factor related to the previous notation, involves differences of linguistic classification in that Basque, akin to Finnish and some languages of the Ural-Altaic regions of eastern Europe, is both flexional and agglutinative, while English, by contrast, is flexional but isolating, thus implying being completely analytic as Chinese. Fourth, and perhaps the most salient characteristic of "euskera" is the complex structure of dialectal variations inherent in the idiom's syntax and certainly in its profuse regionalisms. The diversity of this inscrutable language is such that former grammarians originally divided it into three dialectal groups or units containing therein fifty dialects in addition to four literary ones, twenty-five sub-dialects, which were arranged simultaneously into fifty varieties with twelve sub-varieties. Nowadays, however, linguistic geographical boundaries have nearly merged, which in the process have created modifications in this pristine system of classification, so that current dialectal divisions have been reduced into two large groupings, western Basque or Biscayan, and central-eastern, comprising the regions of Guipúzcoa, Labourd, Soule, and the dialects of Upper and Lower Navarre, with each one having no sub-varieities or sub-dialects in terms of daily usage. Furthermore, it is significant to note that not all dialects are mutually understandable by Basques in those communities straddling either side of the Pyrenees, since vocabulary and orthography will alter considerably from one region to another, and in occasional instances, from one village to the next.

Recent indications have been such that Basque scholars in Spain have accelerated plans toward the fulfillment of a dream, namely the creation of a normative dictionary of the language in the form of an encyclopedia. For instance, Ibon Sarasola, a member of the prestigious Royal Academy of the Basque Language announced at a meeting of the organization in November, 1976, that a special commission of its membership will be charged to design and complete such a lexicon within the next five years. For lexicographers and other specialists in related fields of linguistics, this project has recieved unilateral approbation because it is their belief that its realization will have important bearing on the future viability of the language, particularly in coming months as the language is being taught more and more in private Spanish and French schools. Likewise, Basque scholars in the United States and elsewhere concur that with the existence of a normative dictionary, coupled with a comprehensive Basque-English lexicon, the curious researcher will then be provided with indispensable tools required to carry out investigations into the vast enigma that has surrounded the origin of Basque. In addition, the same researcher will have more than basic reference materials in his efforts to glean significant information relative to Basque etymology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, whether of an historical or descriptive nature. For American Basques, such a lexicon will be useful in their continuous study of English as well as enable them to acquire greater competency in their knowledge of "euskera." Certainly, they will gain proficient use of correct English vocabulary, speech sounds, word definitions and their essential components. In short, it is believed that language skills in both English and Basque will improve considerably with the availability of such a bilingual lexicon, despite in fact the enormous disparity between each tongue. At the outset of the current academic year, it was hoped by members of the aforesaid Basques Studies Program at the University of Nevada-Reno that the eminent Basque scholar, Luis Michelena of the University of Salamanca would come to this country to direct the preparation of the bilingual lexicon together with a staff of other scholars. Regretfully, plans

had to be abandoned for the present moment, but optimism still reigns high in the minds of Basque scholars in this country that the dictionary project will be resuscitated in the near future.

In view of the current gap necessitating a Basque-English lexicon, its reality continues to remain a justifiable objective and undertaking in the eyes of many lexicographers, who adduce proof of its lexical functions and who maintain that such a dictionary will be completed before the coming of the next century. Since the death of Franco, political changes in Spain have occurred which have relaxed certain tensions in the Basque regions, and former regulations prohibiting the use of "euskera" have now been lifted, even though the Spanish government has not officially sanctioned widespread diffusion of the language in courts, churches, industry, and so forth. Naturally the Basque people have a very strong attachment to their ancient language and without "euskera," they believe that their case for a separate or autonomous state is weakened. Furthermore, on a continuous basis, Basques demand that the Spanish government authorize "euskera" as an official tongue equal to Castilian Spanish in their northern provinces. Their aim is to have government operations conducted in both languages, and that "euskera" and Spanish would have equal weight in the curricula of all the schools. Basques contend that in such a way the survival of "euskera" might be insured. In short, the most generous estimate is that only one out of every four Basques can speak his dialect well, but the figure changes to one out of every ten who can probably write it with proficiency. Some journalists write that, in general, "euskera" is the language of the poor, uneducated, isolated, rural inhabitant of the seven provinces that comprise the Basque country of Spain and France.[4] Yet, today, prominent Basque leaders in San Sebastian now study "euskera" in small, private classes styled "ikastolas," much as some black Americans study Swahili or Hausa. Many of them are industrialists whose ties to English-speaking countries around the world are quite strong, and the fact that Basque communities continue to grow in the American West, in the Philippines, Australia, and Indonesia, constitute undeniable

factors in warranting a place for a Basque-English dictionary.

Certainly, as a mandatory prerequisite to compile this kind of bilingual lexicon, a team of English and Basque-speaking experts must devise specific lexicographical objectives they which to achieve, and to minimize the scope of dialectology in the case of Basque by either opting for Biscayan or Guipuzcoan, the two most widely spoken among the people, and, of course, to have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the English language. There is further contention on the part of lexicographers that a dictionary of this kind, perhaps equivalent in terms of value, scholarship, and usability as those of Larramendi, Azcue, Lafitte, and others in their respective generations, will necessitate modifications of lexical viability that will remain functional and applicable to present-day life. The realization of the project will undoubtedly require many years of scholarly dedication by its preparers and editors. Again, the proclivity to compile this bilingual lexicon becomes increasingly more salient and even noticeable with years as scores of Basques are abandoning their farms and villages in the provinces for economic motives in order to re-establish themselves and their families in the United States, as well as in other English-speaking countries world-wide. Because of the ever increasing demographic figures which statistically indicate substantial growth of Basques in our American communities, and more recently in Queensland, Australia, besides the fact that many of them speak "euskera" or are vitally interested in learning it together with a second language, namely English, the concept of a bilingual dictionary combining these two languages no longer constitutes simply a conception, but a reality of need. Interestingly, in modern times, the presence of Basques in industries, restaurants, bakeries, hotels, cattle ranches, trucking lines, dairies, communications, and other walks of life is keenly felt in the American West. For some of them who first arrived in this country to work as sheepherders during the period of the California Gold Rush, their knowledge of "euskera" is, in many instances, rather strong, while that of English may or may not equal

their ability to communicate effectively in any of their regional dialects. What, indeed, must be emphasized is that all Basques, regardless of age or provincial background, are in fact extremely proud people, as the celebrated Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset and other writers have so frequently described in various essays, and as such Basques are vitally concerned about the survival of their unique culture and language. This sentiment can further be applied to the justification of preparing a viable Basque-English dictionary.

As a summary, there easily prevails today significant defense and support for the compilation of a Basque-English dictionary. Regarding explicit reasons for its production and publication, it is worthwhile repeating that it will have scholarly value for linguists around the globe, who have always expressed curious notions and opinions relative to Basque as a puzzling ancient tongue, and whose linguistic anomalies remain nearly completely unresolved for countless generations down to the modern period. Another element can be stressed and that is this bilingual lexicon will serve as a reference work for speakers and non-speakers of Basque, who may wish to acquire new or greater knowledge of the enigmatic language. Moreover, for American Basques and others, this kind of lexicon about we have been discussing, will provide a meaningful tool of information toward learning English and its application to life in our contemporary society. Its supporters likewise contend that its lexical realization will help to restore the glory of a fascinating language, considered in turn by numerous scholars as representing the oldest spoken tongue in Europe, which has been struggling indefatigably for survival since its dubious inception on the Iberian peninsula. Apropos, historians and other scholars in related fields of study, including anthropologists, ethnologists, sociologists, and so forth, have never been

clearly successful in exacting the precise time in the past when Basques originally migrated to that corner of southwestern Europe. Since their tradition-directed society, as sociologists would designate it, clings tenaciously to its deep-rooted heritage and culture, Basques everywhere are dauntlessly concerned with the preservation of their language cherishing it with the same zeal and care that they give to their lives. Whether one chooses to learn Basque, English, or each language simultaneously with the assistance of the proposed bilingual dictionary, one will discover in the process of study, that the former tongue, to say relatively nothing of the latter, is abundantly rich in literature, art, music, and so forth. The actuality that Spanish and French, in their own official manner, have so overwhelmingly across the centuries shadowed or obfuscated the growth and development of "euskera" within Spain and France, will alter considerable as time marches on according to many stalwart followers and supporters of the Basque race. Furthermore, the emergence of a Basque-English lexicon will open doors for newer generations of scholars to research the so-called Basque problem, which has bewildered humanists, linguists, paleontologists, and a host of other social scientists with, to date, its unanswered questions of racial and linguistic identification. Lastly, by way of anticipation, one can draw some analogy between an eye surgeon who waits until his patient's cataract completely ripens before its surgical excision, and the lexicographers who, at a similar moment of need, embarks on the awesome task of compiling a bilingual dictionary to satisfy the needs of people in search of strengthening their competency in one or both languages about which they have different levels of knowledge. Consequently, the lexical exigency is present, the moment of conception is now, and the fruits are to be ripened, so that the project must effect its wheels in full operation and proceed accordingly. One may conclude, herein, that since a bilingual dictionary is a bridge connecting cultures, it is vital that this structure be a sturdy and trustworthy medium through which Basque and English-speaking peoples may become better acquainted with each other. It is anticipated that such a lexicon will fulfill the expectations of these persons and culturally benefit the world at large today, tomorrow, and beyond.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Luis Villasante, O.F.M., Historia de la literatura vasca (Bilbao, 1961), p. 131.

[2]Ibid., p. 304.

[3]---, "Newsletter," Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada-Reno, November, 1975.

[4]Stanley Meisler, "Basques Pressing Angrily for Autonomy," The Los Angeles Times, March 16, 1977, pp. 1-5.